



2023-2027

# Growing Agri-Food Durham

A Five-Year Plan to Grow the  
Agri-Food Industry in Durham Region





# Acknowledgement

Durham Region is located on the traditional lands of the Mississauga Peoples. While the Region has started its journey to develop meaningful relationships and work toward reconciliation with local First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, we recognize and acknowledge that a more comprehensive approach to reconciliation is needed to address systemic inequities and racism; and to better support, celebrate and deliver services to Indigenous Peoples in the region. We give this acknowledgement to show respect to the First Peoples who inhabited this land and to remind ourselves of the importance of strengthening relationships with Indigenous communities and of our continuing commitment to do better.

This strategy endeavours to support the creation of economic opportunities for people of diverse backgrounds, identities, abilities, lifestyles and life stages; and aims to create an inclusive prosperous future for everyone.

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## Introduction

The Growing Agri-Food Durham Plan 2023-2027 (the Plan) is a 5-year action focused document to guide the activities of the Agriculture and Rural Section of the Region of Durham's Economic Development and Tourism Division (Invest Durham Ag & Rural). The Plan is intended to be task oriented towards activities that will benefit the agri-food industry and support industry partners across the Region.

The successful implementation of this Plan will only be possible with the support of the agri-food community and organizations across Durham who are doing work on-the-ground that is pivotal to maintaining and growing the agri-food industry. While not identified as a goal of this Plan, it goes without saying that positive relationships between the Region of Durham, local municipalities, post-secondary (e.g., Durham College) and the agri-food industry are imperative if progress is to be made in advancing the industry overall. This Plan has been developed bearing in mind that relationship development is ongoing, overarching and built upon mutual respect that must be earned over time.

This Plan fits into the Durham Region Strategic Plan under Goal 3: Economic Prosperity, specifically under goal 3.5, Provide a supportive environment for agriculture and agri-food industries. This Plan will be incorporated into the Durham Region Economic Development and Tourism Strategy through Agri-food being identified as a priority industry.





## Executive Summary

The agri-food industry is a key economic driver in the Region of Durham. In fact, Durham is home to more farms and agricultural lands than any other jurisdiction in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Durham represents a grassroots culture where the agri-food community has worked together to achieve their common goals. At the same time, farmers in Durham are adopting innovative technology and practices that are advancing Durham in terms of sustainability and efficiency. The food processing industry is also well-positioned to thrive in Durham.

Since the first Region of Durham Agricultural Strategy (2013-2018), the industry has evolved to adapt to new and emerging trends such as urban agriculture, a changing climate and advancements in agricultural technology and innovation. As such, this new Plan will be a tool to support and facilitate the long-term growth of the agriculture and agri-food industry in Durham.

The Plan identifies 4 overarching themes and 10 goal areas. The implementation plan, contained within this document, details the tasks to be completed within each of the 10 goal areas.

## Overarching themes



Attract, retain and expand agriculture and agri-food businesses



Promote outreach and agri-food education



Enable a supportive policy environment



Support an agriculture workforce

## Goal areas

1. Retain and expand local food businesses
2. Streamline the regulations and approval process for agri-food businesses
3. Enable and encourage agriculture related, on-farm diversified and agritourism uses
4. Advocate for infrastructure support (including broadband)
5. Increase agri-food processing capacity in Durham
6. Identify opportunities and solutions for the workforce and labour shortages in the agri-food industry
7. Provide resources for aging farmers and young farmers
8. Partner with stakeholders and agricultural organizations to deliver and expand agricultural literacy in the Region
9. Enable agri-innovation capacity
10. Enhance urban agriculture



# About the Action Plan

## Background: How did we get here

Invest Durham Ag & Rural provides dedicated support for the agri-food industry. This work was previously guided by the Region of Durham Agricultural Strategy 2013-2018 (the Strategy), which identified goals and actions to be led and implemented by regional staff.

In 2019, the Wilton Consulting Group was retained to undertake consultation and engagement activities to update the existing Strategy. A series of targeted consultations were held throughout the community in the form of a survey, in-person information sessions, one-on-one interviews, and presentations to Agriculture Advisory Committees. Information and feedback was gathered to inform the development of the strategy. This work formulated the basis for the development of the new Growing Agri-Food Durham Plan to replace the existing Strategy.

The new Plan is intended to be more action-oriented and takes a renewed approach to collaboration in supporting the agri-food industry. This Plan is a result of insights from the agriculture and agri-food industry in Durham including farmers, regional and area municipal staff, processors, politicians, academia and key grassroots agricultural groups. Just as this Plan could not have been made possible without the insights from the community, it will take the dedication of the vibrant and diverse agriculture and agri-food partners in Durham to achieve the goals set out in this Strategy.

In early 2020 as the previous Agriculture Strategy was being finalized, several changes occurred including the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, staff undertook an exercise to incorporate the changes and new priorities of the industry which resulted or were emphasized by the pandemic. Over the course of the year, changes were made to the Plan to better reflect the current industry needs and new approach to program delivery. One of the major changes includes transitioning the strategy to be more action-oriented plan, henceforth referred to as the Growing Agri-Food Durham Plan.

**“The new Plan is intended to be more action-oriented and takes a renewed approach to collaboration in supporting the agri-food industry.”**



## Consultation

In 2021, the current version of the Plan was shared with agricultural partners/ organizations in Durham Region as a second round of consultations to ensure the revisions aligned with the view of our local agriculture and agri-food industry. The current version has been presented to the Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee (DAAC), Agriculture Advisory Committee of Clarington (AACC), Durham Farm Fresh Marketing Association (DFF), Durham Region Federation of Agriculture (DRFA) and Durham Farm Connections (DFC). It has also been shared with the Economic Development Advisory





# An Informed Action Plan

Growing Agri-Food Durham:  
Implementation Plan



## Goal 1: Retain and expand local food businesses.

Action(s)	Lead and Support	Timeline (Short, Medium, Long Term)	Performance Metric	Outcome
<p><b>a.</b> Conduct an annual exercise to prioritize and implement actions within the Local Food Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) Action Plan. This will correspond with an annual update report to Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee (PEDC).</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag &amp; Rural</p>	Ongoing	<p>Annual report to PEDC – Prioritization plan included as an attachment.</p> <p>Track actions from the local food BR+E plan (new, completed, and ongoing)</p>	Increased growth and viability of food businesses and farms in Durham Region.
<p><b>b.</b> Accelerate new business start-ups in the agri-food space by developing an information package/toolbox that can be used by the Business Advisory Centre Durham (BACD) and economic development staff at municipalities. (e.g. Development approvals check list, support organization information, information for local area municipalities with signage by law information etc.)</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag &amp; Rural</p> <p><b>Support:</b> Durham Economic Development Partnership (DEDP), BACD, local municipalities</p>	Medium	<p>New toolbox created and distributed to Economic Development Staff, BACD and DEDP members</p>	New agri-food businesses established, and existing agri-food businesses retained/provided an environment to expand their business.
<p><b>c.</b> Develop a business case and strategic next steps to advance an agri-food logistics hub and innovation center. Build on the results of Durham Farm Connections (DFC) Agriculture Centre business case.</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag &amp; Rural</p> <p><b>Support:</b> Durham Tourism, DFC, DRFA, DFF</p>	Long	<p><b>Short term:</b> Complete business case analysis (complete)</p> <p><b>Medium term:</b> Determine next steps to secure funding</p> <p><b>Long term:</b> Establish facility</p>	Local food business startups and expansions resulting from services provided through the creation of a local food hub.
<p><b>d.</b> Support ‘buy local’ campaigns such as Durham Farm Fresh activities to promote agri-food in Durham. (e.g. Gates Open, local food directory, Local Food Week, Ontario Agriculture Week campaigns, DFF initiatives, etc.)</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag &amp; Rural and Durham Tourism</p> <p><b>Support:</b> Durham Farm Fresh, DRFA, DEDP</p>	Short/Ongoing	<p>Increase in local food visibility and awareness in Durham. Increased participation in events, high website traffic and engagements with campaigns.</p>	Increased consumer awareness and support of local food within the region.






## Goal 2: Streamline the regulations and approval process for agri-food businesses.

Action(s)	Lead and Support	Timeline (Short, Medium, Long Term)	Performance Metric	Outcome
<p><b>a.</b> Hold regular check-in meetings and/or communication with Durham Region Planning staff to ensure a united approach to agri-food business development. (e.g., Involvement in pre-consultation meetings)</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag &amp; Rural and Durham Region Planning Division</p>	Ongoing	Regular check-in meeting held twice a year between Economic Development & Planning staff.	A unified and balanced approach to agri-food business development is achieved which considers both planning and economic development priorities.
<p><b>b.</b> Leverage greater community involvement in upcoming policy reviews (Envision Durham) by sharing information through communications channels. Advocate for the value of providing comments to policy reviews.</p> <p>(e.g., create a targeted email/communications plan for agricultural partners on Envision Durham proposed policies)</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag &amp; Rural and Durham Region Planning</p>	Medium/Long	Information shared on upcoming comment periods with partners through meeting updates, social media, newsletters, webinars, advertisements, etc.	Agriculture industry awareness of upcoming policy changes so feedback can be provided towards policy that may impact agri-businesses.
<p><b>c.</b> Plan and host an ‘Agriculture Planning Summit/ Workshop’ to facilitate knowledge sharing between planners and economic developers.</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag &amp; Rural, Durham Economic Development, Durham Region Planning</p>	Medium	Planning Summit hosted.	Planners and economic developers understand the nature of agri-food business and the role of the industry within communities.
<p><b>d.</b> Reach out to area municipal planning staff to share information about the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) and other agricultural organizations’ resources related to Planning and Economic Development.</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag &amp; Rural</p>	Ongoing	Increased participation of local municipal staff at Community of Practice sessions. Information packages shared with municipal staff.	More awareness and utilization of agriculture and agricultural planning resources within
<p><b>e.</b> Implement an expedited approvals process and a concierge service model for agri-food developments to assist with overcoming barriers to business startup and expansion (e.g. site plan approval, building permits).</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag &amp; Rural, Durham Planning, municipal planning.</p>	Long	Expedited approval process launched.	Approval process simplified and wait times reduced for food business expansions and startups, which will help reduce barriers for agri-food businesses.

 **Goal 3: Enable and encourage agriculture related, on-farm diversified uses and agri-tourism uses.**

Action(s)	Lead and Support	Timeline (Short, Medium, Long Term)	Performance Metric	Outcome
a. Write a policy paper to outline the economic advantages of on-farm diversification and agri-tourism. For example, promote the use of CIPs for agriculture.	<b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag & Rural <b>Support:</b> Durham Region Planning, Local Area Municipalities (LAM)	Ongoing	Policy paper published and shared with partners.  Policy paper provided as input for the MCR and OP reviews.	Increased municipal support and reductions in red tape towards on-farm diversified activities.
b. Provide information sessions and workshops focused on tools businesses can use to take advantage of diversification opportunities through value added agriculture.	<b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag & Rural <b>Support:</b> Durham Farm Fresh	Short	Information sessions and workshops hosted.	Increased understanding of the value added and on-farm diversified opportunities for farmers and more farms offering diverse product offerings.
c. Build on action 2.d. to share information about the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and other agricultural organizations resources related to value added agriculture and on-farm diversified uses with planners and economic developers within the region.	<b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag & Rural <b>Support:</b> Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), Durham Region Federation of Agriculture (DRFA), Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), Economic Development and Planning.	Short/Ongoing	Information and resources shared with planning and economic development staff within Durham Region.	Increased internal support for, and understanding around, on-farm diversified uses and the benefits they bring to our community.
d. Build on action 2.e. to implement an expedited approval process and a concierge service model for value added and on-farm diversified and agri-tourism developments to assist with overcoming barriers to business startup and expansion (e.g. site plan approval, building permits).	<b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag & Rural, Durham Planning, municipal planning.	Long	Expedited approval process launched.	Approval process simplified and wait times reduced for food business expansions and startups, which will help reduce barriers for agri-food businesses.

 **Goal 4: Advocate for infrastructure support (including broadband). Recognize infrastructure is a key component of the agri-food system.**

Action(s)	Lead and Support	Timeline (Short, Medium, Long Term)	Performance Metric	Outcome
<p><b>a.</b> Encourage the acceleration of the Employment Lands Servicing Project from an agri-food perspective (e.g. food processing, abattoirs, cold storage, vertical farming).</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham, Durham Region Planning, Durham Region Works</p> <p><b>Support:</b> Invest Durham Ag &amp; Rural</p>	Long	Commitments are made for future servicing allocations and investments in rural employment areas.	Increased availability of serviced land, particularly in underserved rural areas.
<p><b>b.</b> Organize conversations with Hamilton-Oshawa Port Authority (HOPA)/Port of Oshawa and Grain Merchandiser so Invest Durham can provide support when needed.</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag &amp; Rural</p>	Medium	Discussions held with Oshawa Port regarding infrastructure investment plans.	Increased grain export and crop input import into Durham Region through the Oshawa Port.
<p><b>c.</b> Ensure agriculture and rural communities are a key consideration for the expansion of broadband services in Durham.</p> <p>(e.g. assist with getting letters of support from the ag industry for funding applications)</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> Durham Economic Development Broadband Specialist</p> <p><b>Support:</b> Invest Durham Ag &amp; Rural</p>	Long	Broadband expansion into rural communities.	Improved access to high quality internet for agribusinesses to improve competitiveness in the growing trend of virtual business.



## Goal 5: Increase agri-food processing capacity in the Region.

Action(s)	Lead and Support	Timeline (Short, Medium, Long Term)	Performance Metric	Outcome
<p><b>a.</b> Undertake an Agri-Food Processing BR+E, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a comprehensive list of food processing businesses in Durham Region to understand the region’s current food processing capacities.</li> <li>• Investigate co-packing opportunities and areas where business support could be provided by connecting with businesses.</li> <li>• Maintain an inventory of vacant buildings available that can meet the food grade requirements.</li> <li>• Identify food clusters in agri-food processing and areas where the region is lacking across the agri-food processing value chain.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag &amp; Rural/ Business Development Team</p>	Long	<p>Create a food processing business list.</p> <p>Investigate co-packing opportunities. Provide business support.</p> <p>Scan of food grade vacant properties in the region.</p>	Stronger and more resilient agri-food processing industry in Durham.
<p><b>b.</b> Schedule meetings between the Business Development/Investment Attraction, Ag/Rural Team and OMAFRA Investment Attraction Consultants twice each year to discuss strategic opportunities and priorities to enhance Durham’s agri-food industry. Highlight successful businesses for the purpose of investment attraction through the Ontario Food Cluster (OFC).</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> Durham Business Development/Invest Durham Ag &amp; Rural Team/OMAFRA Investment Attraction Team</p> <p><b>Support:</b> OFC</p>	Ongoing	Meet twice a year with focused conversations on Durham’s Agri-food industry.	Increased internal coordination with regards to agri-food investment attraction. Create strategic joint plans to approach agri-food investment and grow the agri-food processing industry.
<p><b>c.</b> Support our existing primary processors including abattoirs, meat processors, and poultry processors by understanding their needs, sharing funding opportunities and resources and advocating for their importance to our agri-food industry. Attract additional food and meat processing facilities to the region.</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag &amp; Rural</p> <p><b>Support:</b> Durham Business Development</p>	Medium/Long	Resources provided to agri-food processors in a timely manner.	Increased meat processing capacity in the region. Increased local meat processing investment startups.

 **Goal 6: Identify opportunities and solutions for the workforce and labour shortages in the agri-food industry.**

Action(s)	Lead and Support	Timeline (Short, Medium, Long Term)	Performance Metric	Outcome
a. Educate youth in the region about the diverse career opportunities available in agriculture through videos, presentations, resource sharing and agricultural programming.	<b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag & Rural <b>Support:</b> Durham Farm Connections, Durham Region School Boards	Ongoing	Resources, videos and presentations shared with schools and students.	Increased awareness of agricultural career options for high school students. Increased number of students interested in working in the agriculture industry.
b. Through collaboration with Durham College and Ontario Tech University, develop a pilot project for internship, co-op and micro-credential opportunities with the goal of increasing skilled-labour capacity in Durham. (e.g. Businesses provide specific training (ex: John Deere), meat cutting and vertical farming micro-credentials, etc.)	<b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag & Rural <b>Support:</b> Durham College, Ontario Tech University	Long	Implementation of agriculture supportive micro-credentials, internships and other ag skills training programs.	Address labour shortages through skills training programs and education to help fill the gaps in the agri-food labour force.
c. Collaborate with Ontario Tech University faculty of education by offering agricultural resources and speakers to provide an agricultural context related to current university programs. (e.g. organize a precision ag speaker to lecture to the engineering program to expose students agricultural occupations/ opportunities in their field of study.)	<b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag & Rural <b>Support:</b> Ontario Tech University	Medium	Resources shared, guest lecturers organized, etc.	Increased level of agricultural exposure to Durham's students to increase awareness around the careers available in Durham's agriculture and agri-food industries.



## Goal 7: Provide resources for aging farmers and young farmers.

Action(s)	Lead and Support	Timeline (Short, Medium, Long Term)	Performance Metric	Outcome
a. Collaborate with leading industry professionals to host a succession planning workshop focused on sharing best practices and resources for successful transition.	<b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag & Rural	Short	Workshop delivered.	More awareness around the importance of planning for farm transition to the next generation or successors. Encourage farms to initiate succession plans.
b. Evaluate the feasibility of developing, or partnering to offer, a regional leadership/mentorship program for young farmers and new Canadian farmers in Durham.	<b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag & Rural <b>Support:</b> Durham College, Farms at Work	Long	Plan developed, feasibility investigated, program implemented (if determined feasible)	Support young people interested in entering the agriculture industry, and the need for younger generations to enter the industry.

 **Goal 8: Partner with organizations and agricultural organizations to deliver and expand agricultural literacy in the Region.**

Action(s)	Lead and Support	Timeline (Short, Medium, Long Term)	Performance Metric	Outcome
a. Provide Regional Council with agricultural events updates with the purpose of garnering support for councilor attendance at local agricultural fairs and other rural and agriculture-related community events throughout Durham. (e.g. Celebrate Agriculture Gala, Spring/Fall Fairs, DFC Open House etc.)	<b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag & Rural	Ongoing	Events shared with council. Councilor attendance and support of agricultural events increased.	Increased political support and recognition of the importance of agriculture and agri-food to our region's economy and community viability.
b. Consider offering financial support for a program developed by partners (such a DFC) to promote agriculture and agri-education in the Region. E.g. Producers post signage that includes information on the crops being grown or livestock raised, and its end uses or mural art to showcase agriculture (Signs of life project).	<b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag & Rural, Durham Farm Connections <b>Support:</b> Durham Region Federation of Agriculture, Durham Region and LAM Works Departments	Long	Signs are installed across the region.	Increased agriculture awareness in our communities with the goal of creating supportive communities with a positive view towards, and basic understanding of agriculture and agricultural practices.
c. Promote and assist with events such as Gates Open, the DAAC Annual Farm Tour, and Durham Farm Connections Open House.	<b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag & Rural	Ongoing	Events hosted and promoted. Increased awareness and attendance.	The agri-food industry in Durham is recognized and valued by the community.
d. Have an active role in educating non-farm communities about agriculture in partnership with Durham Farm Connections (e.g., sharing resource kits, supporting educational events, social media presence and targeted promotional material).	<b>Lead:</b> Durham Farm Connections, Invest Durham Ag & Rural	Ongoing	Successful agriculture education initiatives and programming offered in Durham Region.	More awareness of what is grown/raised in the Region, and the importance of the agri-food industry to the overall economy.
e. Develop agri-food focused economic factsheets with 2021 census data for local area municipalities and stakeholders. (e.g. municipal specific agri-food profiles, land use planning flow chart for development approvals)	<b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag & Rural	Medium	Fact sheets developed and shared with local area municipalities/DEDP.	Municipal staff are knowledgeable about the role of agri-food in their local economy and can make supportive policy decisions.

 **Goal 9: Enable and encourage a culture of innovation in agriculture.**

Action(s)	Lead and Support	Timeline (Short, Medium, Long Term)	Performance Metric	Outcome
<p><b>a.</b> Build capacity for agri-innovation in partnership with local post-secondary and accelerator institutions. E.g., Host agri-innovation field days, or create and deliver an agri-innovation competition including private investors, post-secondaries and industry partners, similar programs are the Smart Cities initiative and Huron County AgPrize; or alternatively or in addition, support establishing an agri-tech category in existing Durham pitch or innovation competitions (such as SPARK Ignite, Access IO).</p> <p>Explore key partner relationship/partner development options for agri-tech innovation.</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag &amp; Rural, Intelligent Communities/Smart Cities Durham</p> <p><b>Partner:</b> Ontario Tech University and Durham College</p>	<p>Long</p>	<p>Implementation of an ag tech competition program.</p>	<p>Youth understand the opportunities to use innovative approaches to solve challenges in the agri-food industry.</p>
<p><b>b.</b> Organize and host a roundtable on vertical farming with key industry partners to discuss requirements for attracting and retaining vertical farming operations in Durham. Develop a list of potential sites with a view to continuing to promote Durham Region as an ideal location for vertical farming. Work towards a supportive zoning environment and actively encourage area municipalities to build an inventory of available real-estate options to improve investment readiness.</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag &amp; Rural</p> <p><b>Support:</b> Durham Business Development</p>	<p>Long</p>	<p>Roundtable hosted.</p> <p>Potential sites for vertical farms identified.</p>	<p>Staff can effectively respond to the needs of vertical farms.</p>





## Goal 10: Enhance urban agriculture.

Action(s)	Lead and Support	Timeline (Short, Medium, Long Term)	Performance Metric	Outcome
a. Conduct a policy and best practices scan for urban agriculture in Durham Region.	<p><b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag &amp; Rural</p> <p><b>Support:</b> Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (GHFFA), Durham Food Policy Council (DFPC) and TNDF (the Nourish and Develop Foundation), and the Barrett Centre of Innovation in Sustainable Urban Agriculture</p>	Medium/Long	Create a document outlining urban ag policy and best practices in Durham.	More capacity to support urban agriculture across Durham.
b. Undertake an exercise to identify urban agriculture assets (e.g., community gardens) and stakeholders (e.g., Durham Food Policy Council - DFPC) to understand the urban agriculture environment and potential in Durham. Share results with the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (GHFFA) therefore contributing to the 5 Year Action Plan.	<p><b>Lead:</b> Invest Durham Ag &amp; Rural</p> <p><b>Support:</b> GHFFA, DFPC, TNDF, and the Barrett Centre of Innovation in Sustainable Urban Agriculture</p>	Long	Map and understand the urban ag assets and policies related to urban agriculture in Durham.	More capacity to support urban agriculture across Durham.
c. Provide support to the start-up of the Durham College Barrett Center of Innovation and Sustainable Urban Agriculture.	<p><b>Lead:</b> Durham College/the Barrett Centre of Innovation in Sustainable Urban Agriculture</p> <p><b>Support:</b> Invest Durham Ag &amp; Rural</p>	Long	Regular conversations held between Invest Durham Ag & Rural and Durham College. Support provided where applicable.	More capacity to support urban agriculture across Durham.



# Snapshot of the Agriculture Industry in Durham



## Global Trends in the Agri-Food Industry

Globally, the demand for agriculture and food is rising. With the global population expected to exceed 10 billion by 2050, the need for increased food production and food access will be a global concern and priority. Climate change and its adverse weather events will continue to place extreme circumstances and challenges on our agricultural system, especially as it relates to weather and growing conditions.

Durham is positioned to help fill the local and global food needs. Internationally, we export grains and meats to our global markets. Durham is fortunate to be home to the Hamilton Oshawa Port Authority – Oshawa Port which has import and export capabilities for agricultural products. When it comes to meat, there is no federally licensed meat processor in Durham, and we recognize food processing is a current gap in our agri-food supply chain.

## Farmland Area

The decline in farmland in Ontario over time has been significant. Whereas the national percentage decline in farmland area between 1951 and 2021 was 11.7%, in Ontario it was 43.6%. (Stats Can 2021). The Ontario Federation of Agriculture predicts 319 acres of farmland are lost to development every day in Ontario. Based on the 2021 census, between 1996-2021 Ontario lost 1.7 million acres of farmland to development. Based on the 2021 census Durham Region has seen a 19% decline in farmland between 2006-2021. Ontario is home to 52% of Canada's Class 1 land, or prime agricultural land, and most of this land is in the southern parts of Ontario.

**This presents a significant opportunity for Durham to be a leader in producing food for our country.**

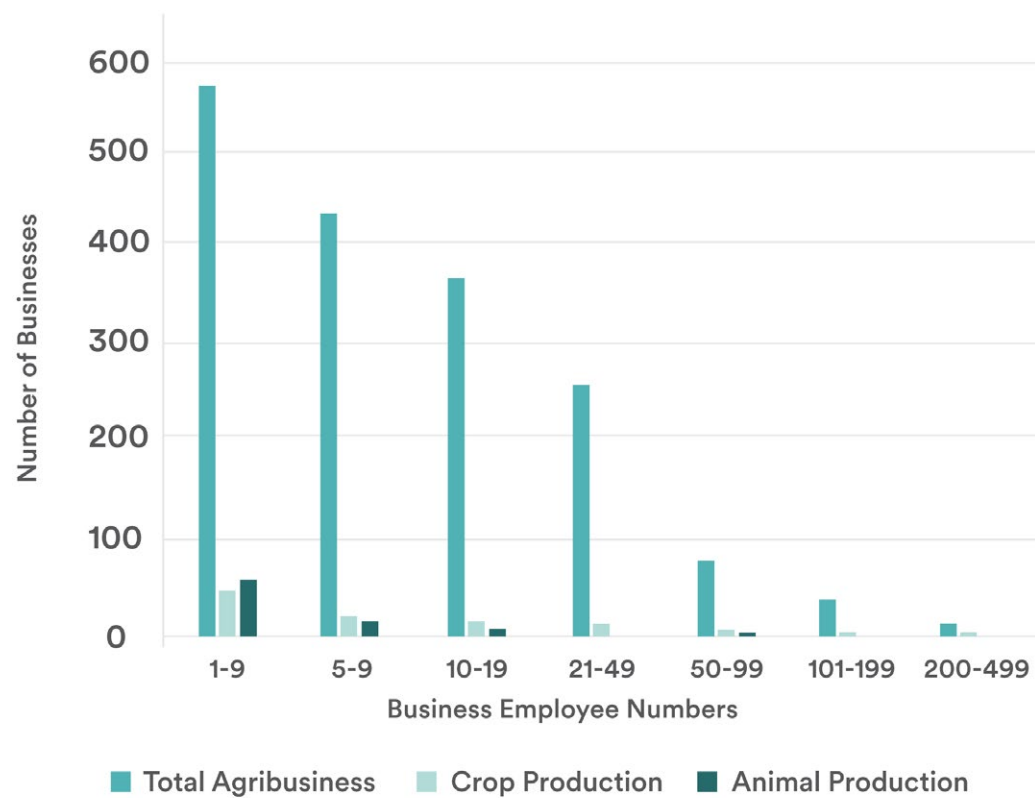
## Farm Trends: Durham Leads the Greater Toronto Area in Agriculture

Durham Region falls within both the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) as well as the larger geographical region often referred to as the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH). Durham has the highest number of farms, acres of farmland and gross farm receipts in the GTA, due to the rural nature of the area and the proportion of the land located in the Greenbelt. The 2021 census indicates that there were 4995 farms within the GGH. Durham's farm population accounts of 24 percent of farms in the GGH, second only to Niagara which accounts for 33 percent.

## Farm Business Size

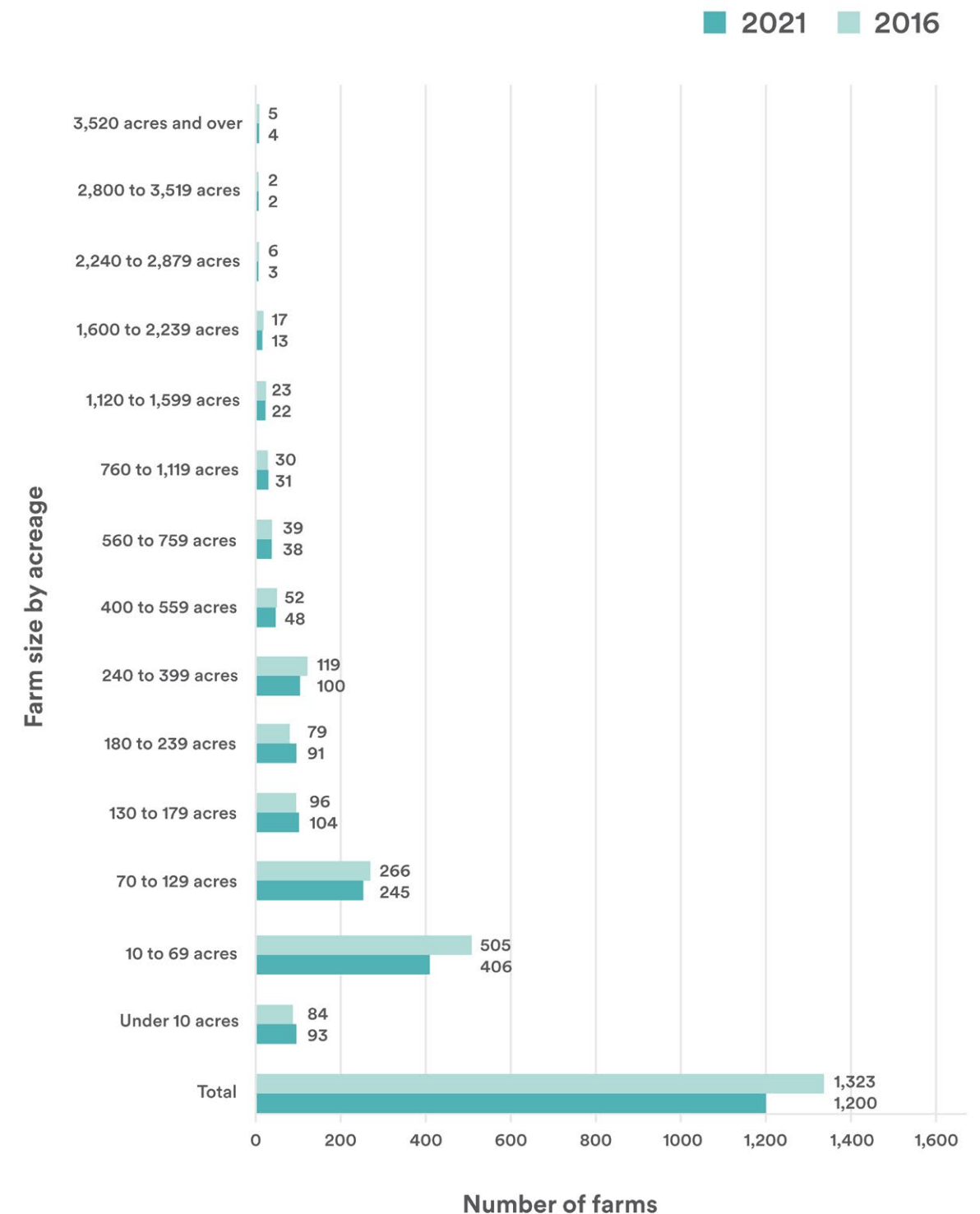
The Canadian Federation of Independent Business defines “small businesses” as those businesses with 1-49 employees. Due to the number of people they employ, farms in Durham are generally considered small business enterprises. In 2021, the only farm business to employ 100 or more employees were crop producers (Figure 2). Crop and animal farm businesses in Durham are represented primarily by those with 1-9 employees, with 137 farm businesses at this size. The next largest number of farm businesses (24). Crop and animal farm businesses are the largest agri-business employer sectors in Durham Region.

**Durham Agri-Food Business Employee Numbers (2021)**



**Figure 1.** Agri-businesses classified by number of employees in the Region of Durham in 2021. Source: 2021 Census of Agriculture.

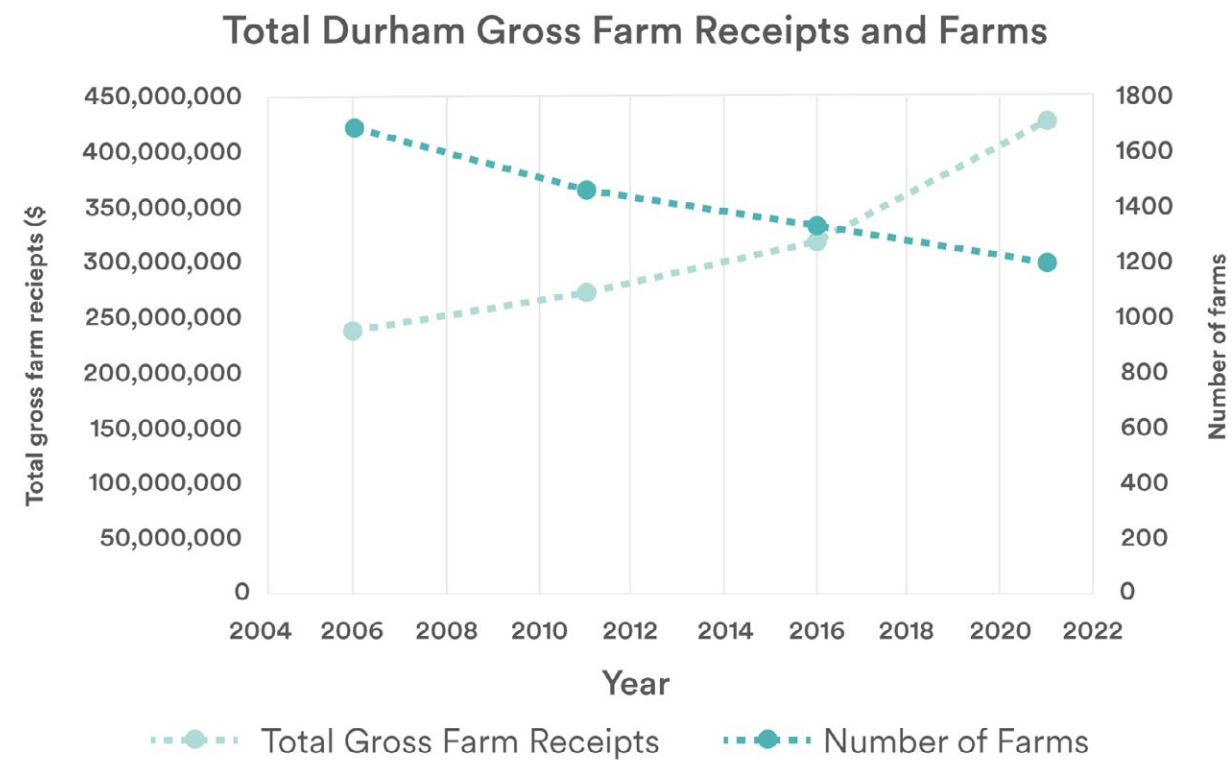
Overall, farm business size by acreage has been increasing. It is also noted that the number of farms of all sizes is declining, but in Durham there is a trend towards larger farms by acreage and fewer farms in total. This indicates that existing farms are growing by purchasing or renting land and adding it to the existing farm business. The overall farmland base is also declining across Durham due to development.



**Figure 2.** Farm business size by acreage in Durham Region, and total farmland base. 2021 Census of Agriculture.

## Fewer, More Intensive Farm Operations

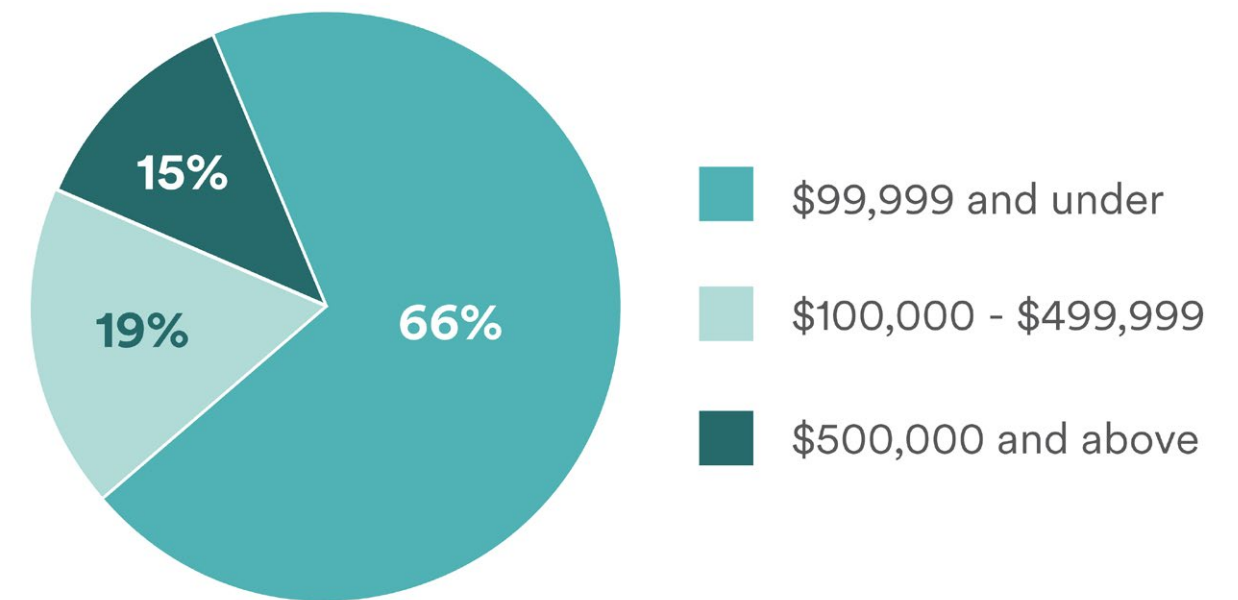
The agricultural landscape in Durham is like that of the Province, where there is a general trend towards fewer, but more intensive large-scale farm operations. Total gross farm receipts for Durham have been steadily increasing since 2006, while during the same time period, the number of farms and acres in production has decreased (Figure 3). Since 2006 there has been a 19% decrease of total land area cultivated in Durham, yet gross farm receipts have continued to grow. This suggests that farmers are increasing production efficiencies by producing more agricultural products with less land.



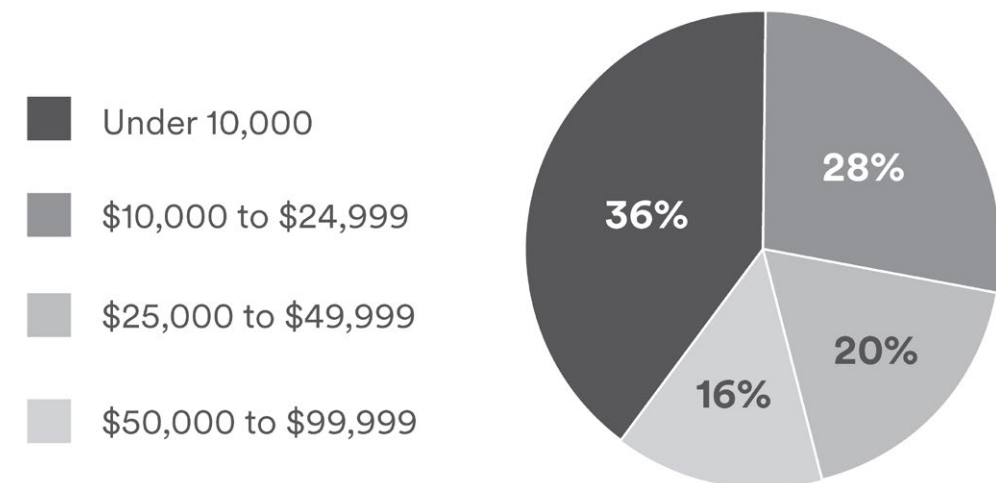
**Figure 3.** Comparing number of farms in Durham Region with the growth of Total Gross Farm Receipts. 2021 Census of Agriculture.

Durham is home to several larger producers, according to the recent 2021 census, there are 14% more large farms generating upwards of \$500,000 in Durham now, which is more than any other previous census year. This follows the same trends seen throughout the Province. The remaining market share is divided into farms that reported \$100,000-\$499,999 (18%) and \$99,999 and under (62%) (Figure 4).

Farm capital Value is increasing, from 2016-2021 Durham saw a 20% increase in farms reporting a capital value of \$1million and more.



**Breakdown of \$99,000 and under:**

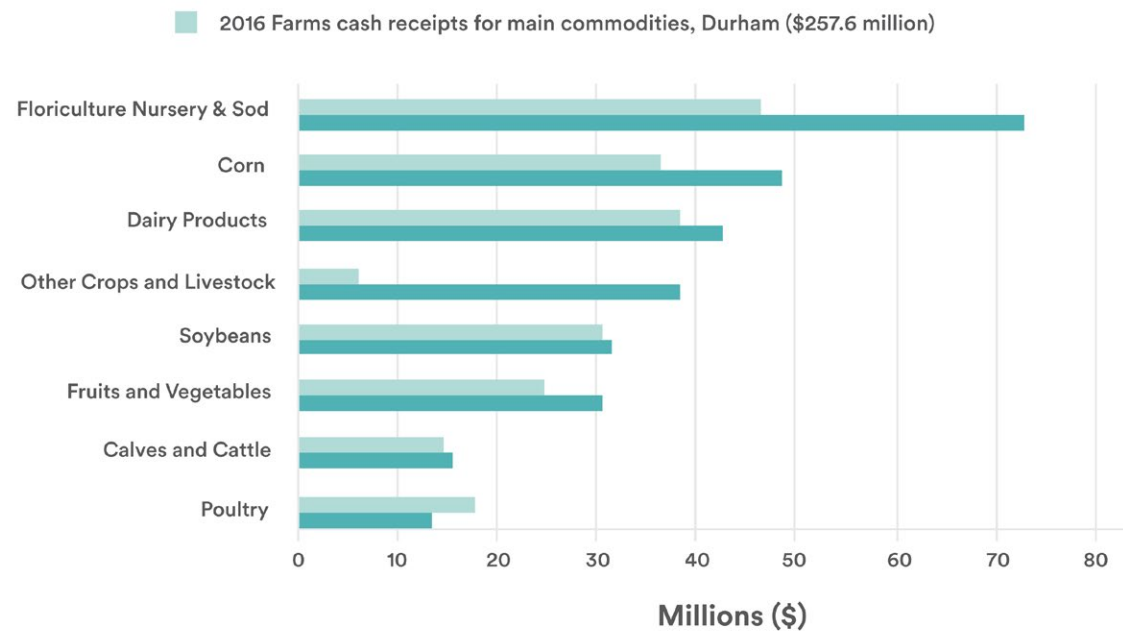


**Figure 4.** Share of Farms, by Gross Farm Receipts in the Regional Municipality of Durham. 2021 Census of Agriculture.

## Farm Cash Receipts Increase in Almost All Top Commodities in Durham

Several top commodities in Durham have increased in terms of farm cash receipts from 2016 to 2021 (Figure 5). Floriculture and nursery production have increased by \$25.26 million making it the most valuable commodity and the largest gaining commodity in the Durham with 154.28% increase in farm cash receipts, from 2016-2021. All commodities shown in figure 5 have experienced increases since 2016 except for poultry production. The general decrease in acreage combined with the trend of higher cash receipts provides evidence that farms in Durham are increasing production efficiencies. These increases are attributed to the highly skilled and innovative farmers in Durham.

### Farm Cash Receipts for Main Commodities 2021, 2016



**Figure 5.** Farm cash receipts for top commodities in the Regional Municipality of Durham. 2021, 2016 Census of Agriculture.

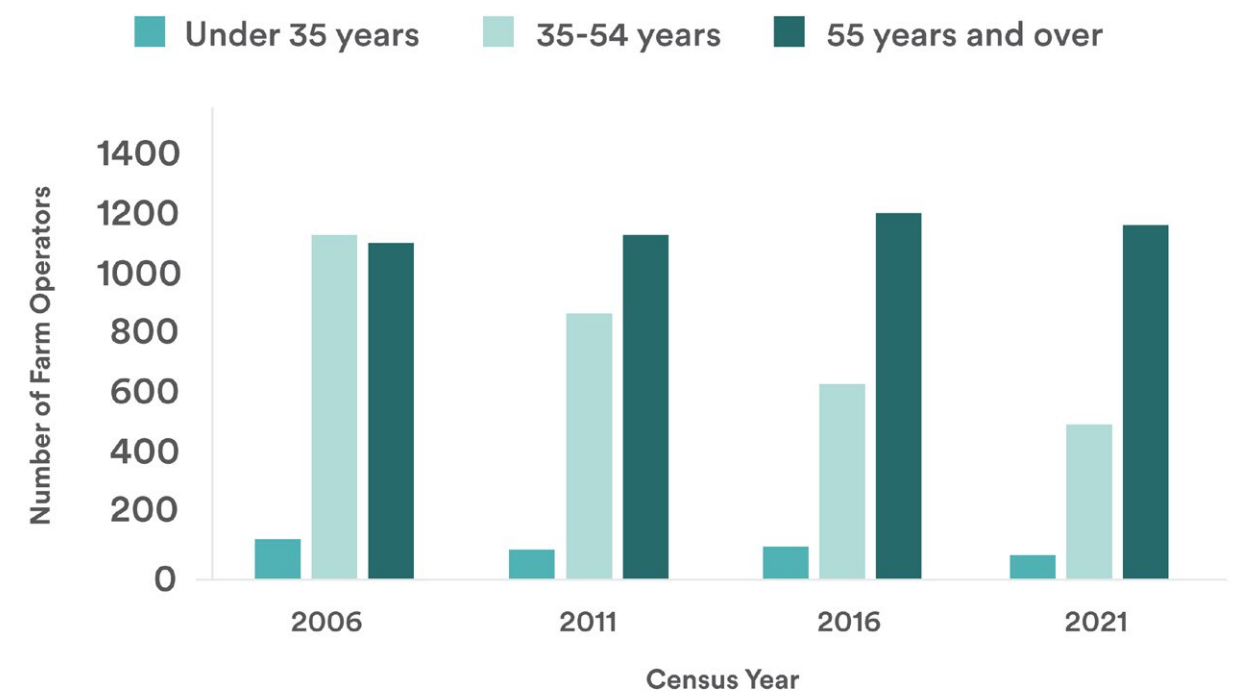
## Farmer Demographics in Durham Region

Census data from 2006 to 2021 was analyzed to see a long-term trend of farmer age increasing in Durham. The average age of farmers in Durham has increased from 54 in 2006 to 59 in 2021 (Figure 6). The average age of farmers in the province has also increased over the same time period, however in 2021 the average age of a farm operator in the province was slightly younger, at 57. Women make up roughly one third of Durham's farmers, a proportion that has remained relatively constant since 2006. Durham and the Province are experiencing a decrease in the number of farmers. In Durham, the total number of female farmers decreased by 27.5% from 2006-2021. The number of male farmers also decreased by 32.4% in the same time period. Interestingly, Durham saw more (4.3%) female farmers with one operator in 2021 than ever before.

Based on the 2021 census, there was a total of 1710 farm operators in Durham. Of those operators, 1170 were male and 540 were female.

With the average age of farmers increasing year over year, succession planning becomes more important to ensure the transition of our farm businesses to the next generation. In 2021, 121 farms in Durham Region reported having a written succession plan., and of those farms 116 have identified family member(s) as the successor for the farm business, and 8 farms have identified a non-family member as the successor.

### Durham Farm Operator Age Overtime



**Figure 6.** Farm Operator age in the Regional Municipality of Durham from 2006-2021. 2021 Census of Agriculture.



## Growth in Value-added and Diversified Agriculture

We are seeing an increased interest in value-added agriculture and agritourism from both producers and consumers in Durham Region, especially since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

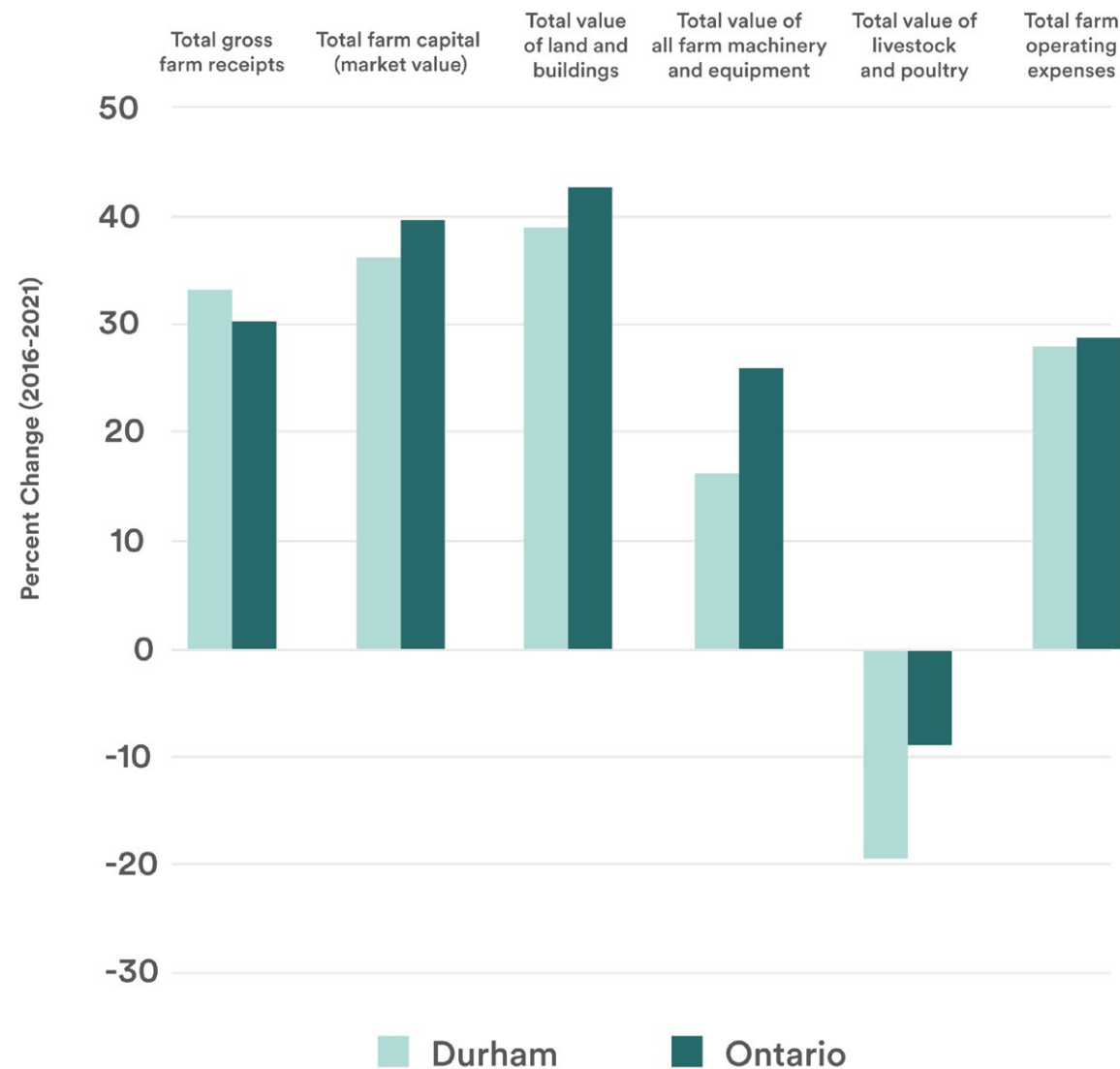
Based on the 2021 census, 291 farms reported direct to consumer sales of agricultural products. 285 of those farms sold unprocessed agricultural products including fruits, vegetables, meat cuts, poultry, eggs, maple syrup, honey, etc., directly to consumers. 48 farms reported selling value-added products like preserves, sausages, wine, cheese, etc.

191 farms in Durham Region reported selling products directly from the farm through farm stands, farm gate sales, kiosks and U-pick. 32 farms sold their products through farmers' markets, 18 sold products through CSA (Community Supported Agriculture), and 21 farms reported selling using other methods.

## Embracing Technology on the Farm

From Figure 8, it is visible that all indicators have increased from 2011-2016 in both Durham and the province. The total market value of seeding, cultivation, planting equipment and all other farm machinery in Durham has increased to a greater degree than the rest of the Province (Figure 8). Over the same time period, Durham's total operating expenses have risen but are 8% lower than the Province. This indicates, in part, that farms in Durham have invested in technological advancements.

### Summary of Farm Capital Indicators, Durham, Ontario



**Figure 7.** Summary of farm capital indicators (2016-2021). Census of Agriculture, 2021.

Here are some examples of technology Durham farmers are implementing at an increasing rate.

Technology Type	Number of Farms Reporting (2021 Census)	Number of Farms Reporting (2016 Census)
Computers/laptops for farm management	-	770
Smartphones/tablets for farm management	-	544
Automated steering (auto-steer)	147	112
GPS technology	-	266
GIS mapping (e.g., soil mapping)	104	71
Greenhouse automation	3	19
Robotic milking	22	13
Automated environmental controls for animal housing	-	68
Automated animal feeding	-	55
Renewable energy producing systems used by the operation	197	131
Variable rate input application	153	-
Drones	27	-
Soil sample test	287	-
Slow release fertilizer	320	-

\*Some data was not collected in certain census years

**Figure 8.** Summary of technology implemented on Durham's farms. Census of Agriculture, 2021.



## Farmland Values and Rental Rates

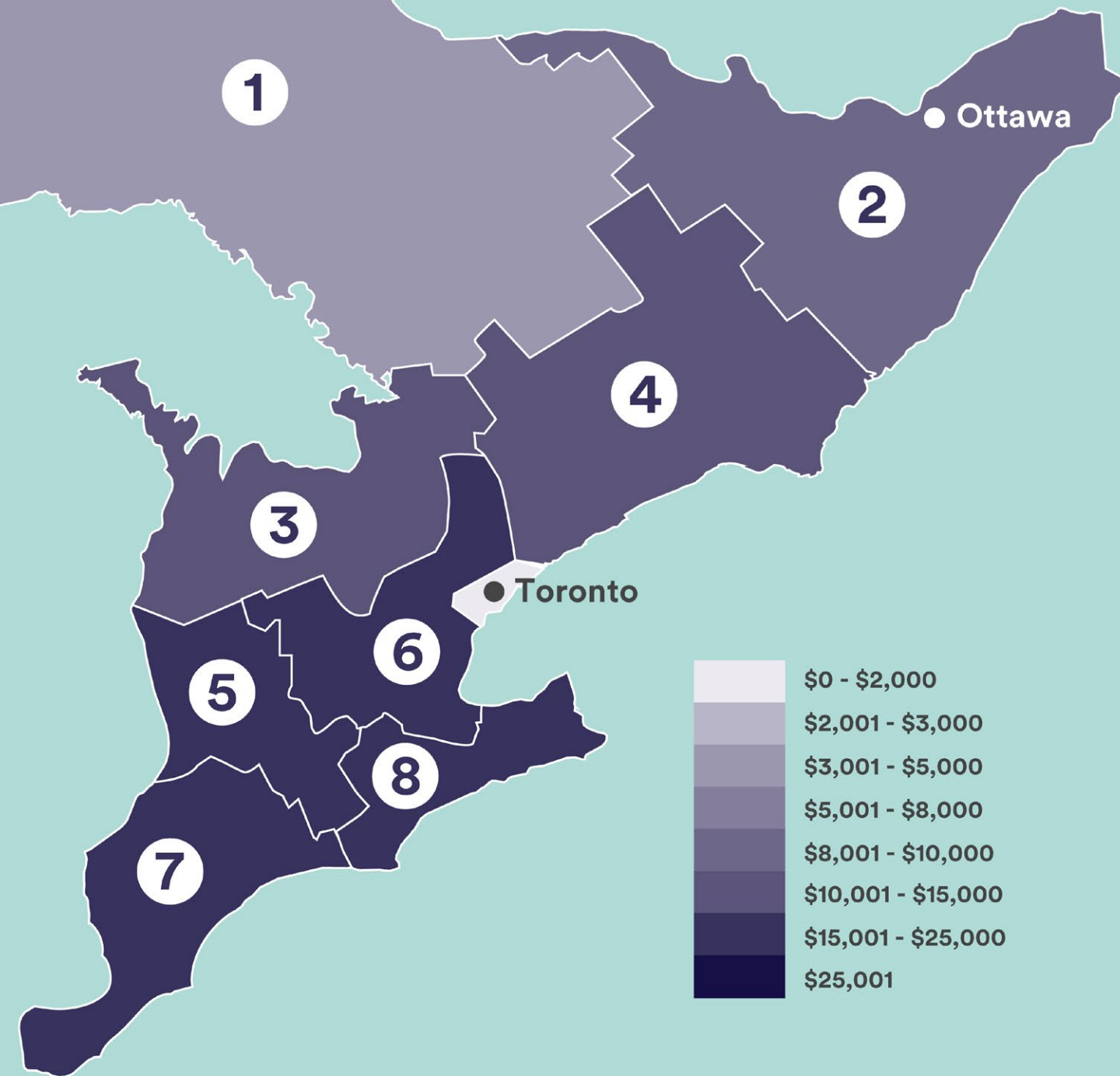
The province of Ontario saw the highest farmland value increases in the country in 2021 with an average annual increase of 22.2%. Durham Region falls within the Central East area of the province which saw a 26.8% increase in farmland values. Prices per acre in the Central East region ranged from \$5,300 - \$19,400 in 2021. The average value per acre is \$10,400. The rent to price ratio (rental rate per acre/value of farmland per acre) in Ontario in 2021 was 1.45%. Based on a survey conducted by the Ontario Agriculture College and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, farmland rental prices averaged \$100/acre.

### Ontario Farm Regions

Region	% Change	Value \$/acre*	Value Range**
<b>1</b> Northern	5.8%	\$3,900	\$1,200 - \$6,700
<b>2</b> Eastern	12.0%	\$9,700	\$4,000 - \$17,100
<b>3</b> Mid Western	28.4%	\$14,400	\$9,000 - \$22,700
<b>4</b> Central East	26.8%	\$10,400	\$5,300 - \$19,400
<b>5</b> South West	22.8%	\$23,500	\$15,500 - \$32,500
<b>6</b> Central West	18.3%	\$23,200	\$14,600 - \$35,500
<b>7</b> Southern	25.3%	\$17,000	\$9,600 - \$25,500
<b>8</b> South East	27.8%	\$15,000	\$10,900 - \$26,700

\* FCC reference value \$/acre

\*\* The value range represents 90% of the sales in each area and excludes the top and bottom 5%.



**Figure 9.** Snapshot of Ontario farmland process by region in Ontario, Farm Credit Canada 2021 Farmland Values Report, and Ontario Agriculture College FVRV Report 2020.

# Agri-Food Asset Map

Durham Region’s agri-food businesses are mapped on the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance ConnectON asset map portal. Below is a snapshot of the agri-food business network that exists in Durham. The most prominent agri-food assets in Durham are the crop and animal production assets (farms).

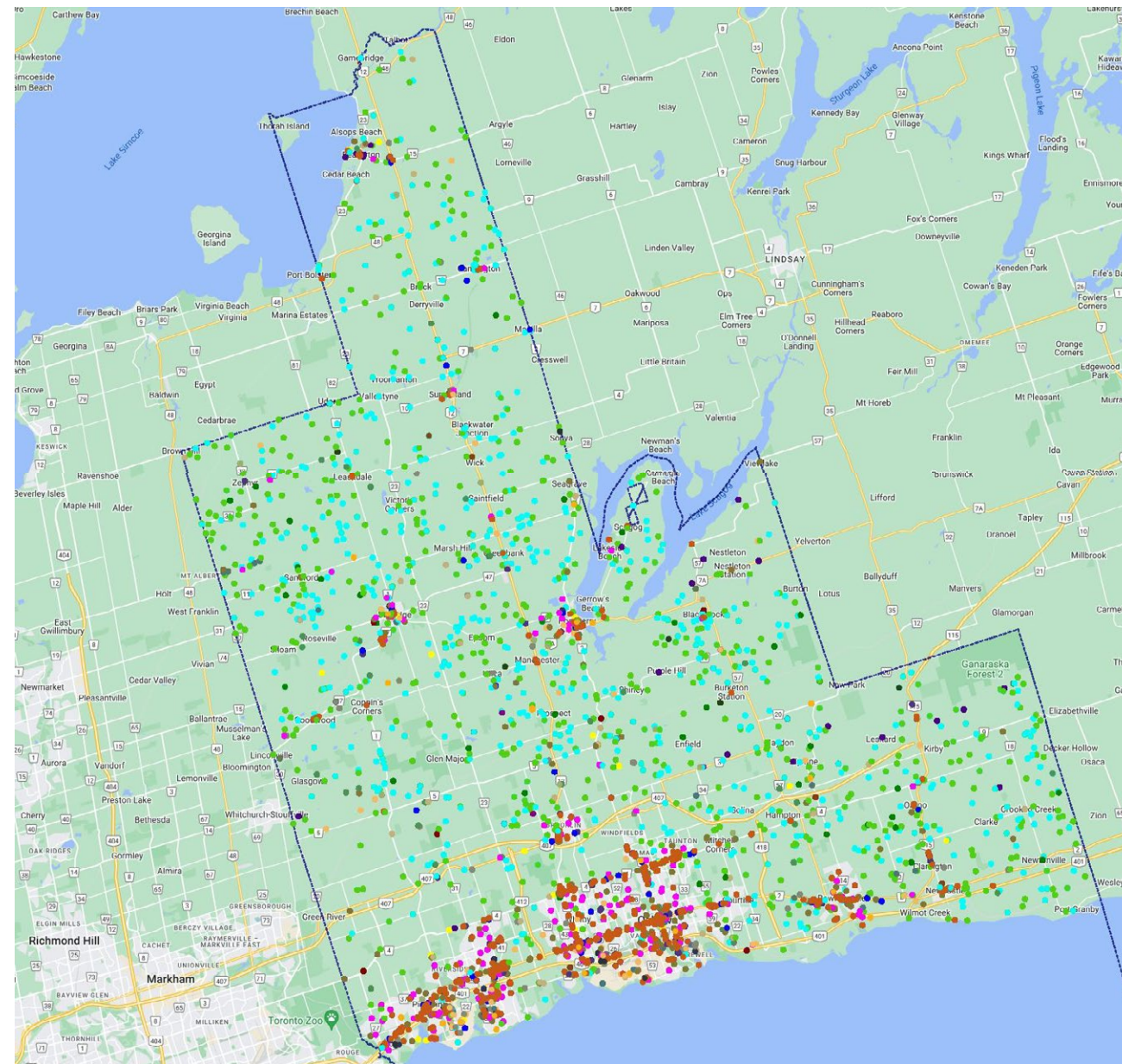


Figure 10. Map of Durham’s agri-food assets, GHFFA ConnectON Asset Map 2022.

# Asset Legend Colours

- Agriculture
- Crop Production
- Animal production and aquaculture
- Forestry and logging
- Support activities for agriculture and forestry
- Oil and gas extraction
- Mining and quarrying (except oil and gas)
- Support activities for mining, and oil and gas extraction
- Heavy and civil engineering construction
- Food manufacturing
- Beverage and tobacco product manufacturing
- Textile mills
- Textile product mills
- Clothing manufacturing
- Leather and allied product manufacturing
- Wood product manufacturing
- Paper manufacturing
- Printing and related support activities
- Petroleum and coal product manufacturing
- Chemical manufacturing
- Plastics and rubber products manufacturing
- Non-metallic mineral product manufacturing
- Primary metal manufacturing
- Fabricated metal product manufacturing
- Machinery manufacturing
- Computer and electronic product manufacturing
- Electrical equipment, appliance and component manufacturing
- Transportation equipment manufacturing
- Furniture and related product manufacturing
- Miscellaneous manufacturing
- Farm product merchant wholesalers
- Food, beverage and tobacco merchant wholesalers
- Machinery, equipment and supplies merchant wholesalers
- Miscellaneous merchant wholesalers
- Building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers
- Motor vehicle and parts dealers US
- Electronics and appliance stores US
- Food and beverage stores
- Gasoline stations
- Sporting goods, hobby, book and music stores US
- Miscellaneous store retailers
- Air transportation
- Rail transportation
- Water transportation
- Truck transportation
- Transit and ground passenger transportation
- Pipeline transportation
- Scenic and sightseeing transportation
- Support activities for transportation
- Couriers and messengers

## Agri-Food Processing and Other Related Agri-Business

A considerable number of value-added food processing facilities in Durham are located on existing farm operations. Additional off-farm food processing activities in Durham include oilseed processing, fruit and vegetable canning, dairy creamery, pickling and drying, and several commercial bakeries. Foreign direct investment in agri-food processing includes (but is not limited to) Del Monte Fresh Produce and Hela Spice Canada. There is currently one livestock abattoir in Durham, which is provincially inspected. There are no federally inspected abattoirs in Durham, meaning all meat processed in the region cannot be shipped outside of the Province. The closest federally inspected plants are in the City of Toronto, limiting the ability for Durham farm operators to export their products outside of the province.

## Industry Competitiveness

Durham has a lower concentration of agri-food industries compared to the rest of the Province. However, many of these industries are gaining momentum, indicating that Durham outperforms compared to the rest of the province. Despite having a lower concentration of farms in the regional economy compared to the Province, they were quite competitive. A number of processing, or value-added industries are gaining in the industry. One such industry is the fruit and vegetable preserving and specialty food manufacturing industry. This could provide a unique opportunity given recent research showing that this is an industry that is diminishing in the Golden Horseshoe at large.

Given Durham's proximity to consumer markets, and numerous transportation channels including the Oshawa Port and multiple 400-series highways, Durham Region is in a great position to be a leader in supplying our urban markets and province with food and other farmed products.

Durham is also home to specific food assets including Sobeys and Gordon Foods distribution centers. This is a great base for our agriculture and food businesses to grow on, which we have been observing increasingly over time.





# Agri-Food Network

## Agriculture System – Agri-Food Network

Durham Region’s economy is driven by our agriculture and agri-food industry. It is where multi-generational farms are sustained, and new agriculture and agri-food businesses succeed. It is where investment in agriculture-related processing and technological advancements are made to meet the demands of our domestic and global markets and ensure the viability of our farm family businesses.

The agriculture system approach looks at the fullness of the agri-food value chain in Durham, along with a strong and viable agricultural land base. The agri-food network of businesses in Durham is a key contributor to the success of Durham’s agri-food economy. We need to have an inventory of primary producers, food processors, agriculture input and supply businesses, transportation networks and more to support the industry and service its needs as locally as possible.

The Agriculture System is a component of the Envision Durham/Municipal Comprehensive Review of the Region of Durham Official Plan.

## Agricultural Champions for the Region

Durham has a strong agriculture and food network that plays an important role in the growth of the industry. The following section provides a brief overview of the various champions and partners in Durham. The work of the Region’s Agriculture Economic Development staff would not be successful in the community without the support and buy-in from community partners. We are so appreciative of their expertise and ongoing support, an annual update will be provided to Regional Council and industry partners to demonstrate successes in the ongoing implementation of this Plan.

### Academia

Durham is home to three post-secondary institutions including Durham College, Ontario Tech University, Trent University Durham GTA. Key assets related to the agricultural industry include the W. Galen Weston Centre for Food and Barrett Centre of Innovation in Sustainable Urban Agriculture at Durham College and the various faculties at Ontario Tech University including education, engineering, and applied science. Durham College is also in the midst of establishing the Barrett Centre of Innovation in Sustainable Urban Agriculture which will serve as a leading-edge example for education, research and replication in other global jurisdictions. It will be an opportunity to further develop the ‘field-to fork’ philosophy. These institutions provide a valuable talent pipeline to Durham’s agri-businesses.

Photo courtesy of Durham College

## **Agricultural Advisory Committees**

There are several Agricultural Advisory Committees in Durham that provide agricultural industry input towards municipal and regional policies and initiatives. The Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee and Agricultural Advisory Committee of Clarington have been recognized as a successful and highly involved committees in part due to the knowledge, expertise, and commitment of these groups to effectively review agricultural issues and topics.

## **Durham Farm Connections**

Durham Farm Connections is a volunteer-based organization dedicated to providing an agriculture education experience for the residents in Durham to ensure the viability of the agriculture industry. The group organizes initiatives such as a grade 3 education program, a high school program, an annual open-house and presence at fairs and events.

## **Durham Farm Fresh Marketing Association**

The Durham Farm Fresh Marketing Association is a not-for-profit membership-based organization representing farms farmers' markets and restaurants throughout Durham. The organization helps local producers and others committed to local food, market local products to the community. Durham Region Federation of Agriculture.

The Durham Region Federation of Agriculture (DRFA) is one of 52 county and regional federations supported by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. The DRFA represents the voice of agriculture in the local community and advocates on behalf of farm families in Durham on local agricultural issues.

## **Golden Horseshoe Food & Farming Alliance**

The Golden Horseshoe Food & Farming Alliance (GHFFA) is made up of municipalities, governments, organizations, and local representatives from the food and farming value chain. GHFFA supports the growth of the agriculture and agri-food industry through strategic planning and farmer interaction. This has led to positive growth of the agricultural industry in Durham.

## **Leading Livestock Genetics**

Leading Livestock Genetics (LLG) is an alliance of dairy cow and dairy goat breeders who provide quality livestock genetics to many countries around the world via live animals and embryos. LLG works to showcase high quality and efficient animals for sustained living globally.

## **Agricultural Societies**

There are several agricultural societies in Durham that are dedicated to showcasing the agricultural industry through educational opportunities and fairs. The fairs are an opportunity to bridge urban and rural communities through displays, competitions, livestock shows, live music, and more.

## **Durham Region Junior Farmers**

Junior Farmers is a membership organization focused on building rural and agricultural leaders who contribute to their local communities. The club is built around hosting social events and volunteering to support community events all while building a network of youth. The Junior Farmers in Durham are the future leaders in Durham Agriculture.

## **Durham East and Durham West 4-H**

4-H clubs provide opportunities for youth in Durham to learn leadership and soft skills, and about agriculture. 4-H is built on Durham's strong agricultural community and volunteers, and the youth who participate gain the knowledge, skills, networks and passion for agriculture and community which benefits our region and agriculture industry immensely.

## **Farms at Work**

Farms at Work promotes healthy and active farmland in Durham, Kawartha Lakes, Peterborough, Northumberland, Haliburton, and Hastings. Activities include but are not limited to supporting farmers with expansion and diversification to ensure farmland stays in production; attracting new farmers to east central Ontario; supporting access to farmland and financing for new farmers; and providing opportunities for new and establishing farmers to integrate into the agricultural community through mentorship, internship, and events.

## **Durham Food Policy Council**

The Durham Food Policy Council is a community-based group that supports food security through sovereignty and a sustainable local food system in Durham. The Food Charter, endorsed by Durham Region in 2009, provides the mandate and direction for ongoing work of the Council.



# Appendix

## Summary of Feedback Gathered/Consultation

In 2021 - 2022, the current version of the Plan was developed based on feedback received by our agri-food partners over the past 3 years since the 2019 Draft Agriculture Strategy was created. A scan of our agricultural system and business data was also conducted to help inform the priority areas identified in this plan. The draft Growing Agri-Food Durham Plan was shared with agricultural partners in Durham Region as a second round of consultations to ensure the direction and actions aligned with the view of our local agriculture and agri-food industry. The current version has been presented to the Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee, Agriculture Advisory Committee of Clarington, Durham Farm Fresh Marketing Association, Durham Region Federation of Agriculture and Durham Farm Connections and other interested individuals and groups. Support was received to proceed with this version of the Growing Agri-Food Durham Plan.

## Implementation

This Plan will be led by Invest Durham Ag & Rural. The implementation of the Plan will be a collaborative endeavor between local agricultural champions, partner support organizations, Regional and municipal staff, education platforms and institutions, area municipalities and other community members. Durham will provide regular updates on the progress of this Plan to Regional Council. An annual report card with progress made towards measurable outcomes will be presented to the Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee and other key partners.



# Agriculture, Agriculture related and On-farm Diversified Use Examples

Type of use and criteria for the use (from Provincial Policy Statement policies and definitions)

## Agricultural Use

1. The growing of crops, raising of livestock and raising of other animals for food, fur, or fibre.
2. Includes associated on-farm buildings and structures, including, but not limited to livestock facilities, manure storages, value-retaining facilities and accommodations for full-time farm labour when the size and nature of the operation requires additional employment.
3. All types, sizes and intensities of agricultural uses shall be promoted and protected in accordance with provincial standards.
4. Normal farm practices shall be promoted and protected in accordance with provincial standards.

## Agriculture-Related Use

1. Farm-related commercial and farm-related industrial uses.
2. Shall be compatible with and should not hinder surrounding agricultural operations.
3. Directly related to farm operations in the area.
4. Supports agriculture.
5. Provides direct products and/or services to farm operations as a primary activity.
6. Benefits from being in close proximity to farm operations.

## On-Farm Diversified Use

1. Located on a farm.
2. Secondary to the principle agricultural use of the property.
3. Limited in area.
4. Includes, but not limited to, home occupations, home industries, agri-tourism uses, that produce value-added agricultural products. Shall be compatible with, and shall not hinder, surrounding agricultural operations.

**Reference:** OMAFRA's Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas

## Agriculture Use

- Raising livestock
- Growing Crops
- Pasture
- Barns
- Manure storage
- Grain storage/driers
- Nursery/tree farms (including Christmas trees)
- Greenhouses
- Aquaculture
- Mushroom farming
- Feedlots
- Feed storage and related infrastructure (bunker silos, upright silos)
- Equipment sheds
- Permanent and temporary housing and accommodation for full-time and seasonal farm labour
- Cold storage (for farm use)
- Food processing (minimal amount to make product saleable, maple syrup evaporator, honey extraction)

## Agriculture Related Use

- Farm gate sales of locally produced agricultural products
- Produce storage and distribution
- Agricultural research center
- Winery using mostly local grapes
- Cidery using local fruit
- Grain storage and drying for multiple farmers
- Flour mill for local grain
- Auction for local produce or agricultural products
- Livestock stockyard or assembly yard
- Farm equipment repair shop
- Farm input supplier (feed, seed, fertilizer, farm supplies, etc.)
- Abattoir (processing and/or selling meat)
- Food processing for local agricultural products (fruit pitting, canning, packaging, flash-freezing, etc.)

## On-Farm Diversified Use

- Home industries (workshops, welding, wood working, sawmills, fabrication/manufacturing, seasonal storage including trainers, boats, fertilizer, etc.)
- Home occupations (bookkeeping, professional offices, hairdressing, art studio, therapy, land surveyor, daycare, vet clinic, kennel, workshops and classes, etc.)
- Agri-tourism uses (bed and breakfast, petting zoo, vacation suite, hay rides, corn maze, farm themed playground, wine tastings, equine events, etc.)
- Café/small restaurant, food store (ice-cream, bakery, cheese, etc.)
- Retail uses (farm market, tack shop, antique business, etc.)
- Value-added uses (processing, packaging, bakery, cheese, etc.)

**Reference:** Grey County, Cultivate Grey Discussion Paper

## The Previous Agricultural Strategy 2013-2018

The previous strategy provided a roadmap to enable us to:


- Build relationships with agriculture and agri-food business (through BR+E and Familiarization tours).
- Showcase Durham Region agriculture and agri-food businesses and the large contribution they make to our economy.
- Proactively seek investment opportunities both foreign and domestic to help existing businesses expand as well as address gaps in the value chain (such as cold storage, packaging, distribution and feasibility study research).
- Provide a platform for informing and educating elected officials, the public and stakeholders about agriculture and “what is happening” in the industry.
- Provide dedicated resources (both financial and in-kind time) to support the initiatives of agriculture stakeholders, organizations and groups (i.e. Durham Farm Fresh, Durham Farm Connections, and others).
- Contribute input to policy development at all levels of Government.
- Assist agriculture and agri-food organizations, groups, and businesses to access grants and funding (provide resources, support letters, co-applicant).
- Connect stakeholders where there are potential partnership opportunities to support larger initiatives that benefit a wider range of opportunities.







**InvestDurham.ca**

 Durham Region, Ontario, Canada

If this information is required in an accessible format, please contact Economic Development and Tourism at 905-668-4113, ext. 2619.